

# Goosebumps

SERIES 2000

R.L. STINE

*Another summer.  
Another spirit.*



Return to  
Ghost Camp

31

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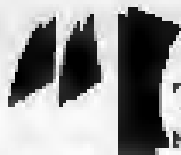
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"I'll do anything you say. Just don't send me away."

"Dustin, there's nothing you can do to change our minds." Dad shook his head with disgust. "This is for your own good."

"If you send me away, something horrible will happen. I have a really bad feeling about this."

"You're not going to prison, Dustin. You're going to sleep-away camp." Dad sighed.

"Prison. Prison." Logan, my eight-year-old brother, jumped up and down on my bed, singing, "Dustin's going to prison."

"Shut up, Logan." I sat down on the floor and stared at the light-gray duffel bag at my feet.

DUSTIN MOVING was neatly printed across the front in thick black Magic Marker. Mom made sure to use the kind of marker that doesn't wash off.

I looked at my clothes folded neatly on my bed. A stack of T-shirts. Jeans. Shorts. My mother was writing my name on everything I owned. Even my underwear.

"Dustin's going to prison." Logan jumped higher and higher.

"SHUT UP, Logan," I warned my brother.

Dad scooped up the stack of T-shirts and packed them into the duffel.

I glanced at my favorite Hulk Hogan poster hanging over my desk. Tonight would be the last night I'd see it for four whole weeks.

Four terrifying weeks at sleep-away camp.

How can they do this to me?

How can they send me away for four weeks?

I'll never survive, I thought.

I'm too shy to make new friends.

I'm too klutzy to play sports.

Maybe if I was built like Hulk Hogan, I'd want to go to camp, I thought. Strong arms. Muscular legs. That's what you need to be a good athlete.

But I'm not built like the Hulk. I'm really skinny. My arms and legs are perfectly straight. Not even a hint of a muscle. Even my straight brown hair looks skinny.

I'm a terrible athlete. A weakling. I can't squash a fly.

Flies.

Will the camp have a lot of flies? I wondered.

I hate bugs.

Sleep-away camp probably has lots of disgusting bugs, I thought.

Ticks that burrow under your skin and suck the blood right out of you.

Mosquitoes that make your brain explode when they bite you.

"Uh—do you think camp will have a lot of bugs?" I asked.

Mom and Dad rolled their eyes.

"Prison. Prison. Dustin's going to prison."

"SHUT UP, LOGAN!"

"Dustin's going to prison." Logan jumped so high he touched the ceiling. "And I'm going to take his room!"

"It's my room!" I shouted. "And you'd better stay out of it while I'm gone!"

"It's my room now." Logan pounded the mattress with his feet. *Mine. Mine. Mine.*

I leaped up from the floor and tackled my brother in midjump.

"Stop, Dustin! Get away from me!" he yelled. "There's a spider on your arm!"

I jumped off the bed. Slapped at my arms. "Where? Where is it?" I cried.

"You're such a total wimp." Logan snorted. "I should be the one going to sleep-away camp. Not you."

Logan slid off the bed and started crawling into my duffel bag.

"Logan, get out of there." Mom dragged my

brother out of the bag. "You are going to sleep-away camp. Just be patient. You leave in a couple of weeks."

"But why can't I go now?" Logan whined.

"Because Dustin got the best place in the four-week program. We already explained this to you. You're going for the two-week program," Dad said. "Now, go to your room. Dustin's all packed, and he has to go to bed."

"I want to go to camp tomorrow," Logan complained as they left my room. "Why is Dustin always the lucky one?"

Lucky. Ha, I thought as I climbed into bed.

I pulled the blankets up to my chin. I settled my head deep into my pillow. And closed my eyes.

An hour later I was still wide awake.

Thinking about camp.

Thinking about no friends for a whole summer.

Thinking about bad food.

Thinking about mean counselors . . .

I must have fallen asleep right after that. Because the next thing I knew, I was standing outside my house, my trunk and duffel bag beside me, waiting for the camp bus to arrive.

It was a bright, sunny morning. The grass in our front yard sparkled with dew.

A big yellow bus roared as it turned our corner. I read the black letters painted on its side: CAMP FULL MOON.

Here is it, I thought miserably. Right on time.  
'The bus pulled up to the curb just as Mom, Dad,  
and Logan came out to hug me good-bye.

"I want to go," Logan griped as I dragged my  
duffel bag to the bus.

The bus doors opened.

I took a step inside.

Glanced up at the driver — and gasped.

His face was red and swollen — and covered  
with fleas.

Angry red blotches swelled on his forehead —  
raw, fresh flea bites, dripping with yellow gunk.

I raised my eyes to his hair — and screamed.

His hair was moving!

His hair was alive with fleas. Hundreds of fleas  
nesting in his scalp.

I watched them glide on their spindly legs.  
Glide along the bus driver's greasy brown hair.  
Glide until they reached the driver's cheeks. Then  
burrow under his skin.

I watched in horror as a flea leaped onto his  
nose. Started to gnaw at it. Dug in deeper,  
deeper — until a thin stream of blood trickled out.

Before I could move, the driver jumped from his  
seat.

He reached out for me with black-gloved hands.

No. Not gloves.

His hands were black with fleas.

"Going to Camp Full Moon?" he snarled.

Then he reached out for me.

Grabbed my arms tightly with his flea-covered  
fingers.

"Let me go!" I screamed.

I twisted in his grip — and a swarm of fleas  
leaped from his fingers.

Landed on my arms.

Punctured my skin — and started to feed.





**"L**et go of me!" I cried.  
I yanked my arms free from the bus driver's grip.

I wiggled at the fleas. Brushed my arms frantically. But the tiny bugs dug deeper into my skin.

"Get them off me!" I shrieked. I shook my arms frantically. "Get them off! Get them off! Get them —"

Someone grabbed my shoulder. Shook it hard.

"It's okay, Dustin. You're okay."

I opened my eyes. My mother leaned over my bed, shaking my shoulder. Shaking me awake. "You were dreaming."

I sat up in bed. "It wasn't a dream," I croaked. "It was a nightmare. A horrible nightmare about the camp bus driver. He was covered with fleas."

Mom sat down on my bed. "Dustin, you have

nightmares about everything." She shook her head. "You have to lighten up. Stop being so timid about everything."

"I can't help it," I said. "It's just the way I am."

"Well, here's your chance to be different. You're going to a brand-new camp, with new kids you've never met. Try to be a different, braver person. If you think you're brave, you will be brave," she declared.

"Yeah. Sure," I muttered, still picturing all the Beas.

"A different person. A braver person," I mumbled to myself as the camp bus turned onto my block. "I'm going to be a different, braver person."

The bus pulled up to the curb. As the doors swung open, I remembered my nightmare. I held my breath—until I could get a look at the bus driver.

He was a young guy, wearing jeans and a navy-blue camp T-shirt with the words **CAMP FULL MOON** printed in yellow letters across the front.

I studied his face. No bugs.

I glanced up at his blond hair. No bugs.

I quickly checked out his hands. No bugs.

I let out my breath.

"Come on in!" He smiled. He loaded my duffel bag onto the bus, and we took off.

The bus was filled with kids. A few of them were

howling. But most of them were laughing. Joking around. A lot of them seemed to know each other already.

I took a seat by myself at the back of the bus.

I watched the other kids. Wondered if any of them would be in my bunk. Wondered if any of them would be my friends.

"We're making our last pickup," the bus driver announced. "Then it's on to Camp Kool Moon!"

Everyone on the bus cheered.

The bus pulled to a stop. The doors opened and a kid about twelve, my age, got on. He wore khaki shorts, a black shirt and black Nikes with no socks.

His brown hair stuck out of a black baseball cap, turned backwards. His face was covered with freckles — right up to his big green eyes. He was about my height, and he had muscles.

He sat down next to me.

"Hi. My name is Art Davis," he said.

I told him my name and we started talking. He was a great guy. Really friendly. And a gymnast. That's why he had muscles. This was his first time at Camp Kool Moon too.

"I can make a knock-knock joke out of any words," he said. "Try me."

"Okay," I said, thinking.

"Make it a hard one," he told me. "I'm really good at this."

I looked out the window as we drove by a firehouse. "Okay," I said. "Fire engine."

"Easy one," he smiled. "Knock-knock."

"Who's there?" I asked.

"Fire engine."

"Fire engine who?"

"Fire engine one and get ready to blast off!" Ari laughed. "Try another."

"Ari," I said. "Use your name."

He thought for a minute. Then he snapped his fingers. "Got it," he said. "Knock-knock."

"Who's there?" I asked.

"Ari."

"Ari who?"

"Am there yet?"

His knock-knock jokes were kind of lame, but I laughed anyway. He had such a good time telling them.

"Do you like to play practical jokes?" He took off his baseball cap and tossed it on the storage rack above us.

"I've never really played one," I admitted.

"Never?" He raised his eyebrows in disbelief. "I play them all the time. I pulled off a really great one on the last day of school," he said.

"What was it?"

"I took the hinges off the art supply closet. When the teacher pulled on the doorknob, the door fell on top of him!"

I laughed. "Did you get into trouble?"

"Not for that one." He smiled. "But I got into trouble once for gluing my teacher's desk drawers shut."

I glanced out the window. The bus was leaving the city. We were on our way to Camp F.J. Allen.

I didn't have much time to worry about camp, though. Ari told me about a million practical jokes he had pulled. And before I knew it, two hours had passed.

"Hey! I've got a great idea," Ari said when we were almost there. "Let's play a practical joke on the counselors."

"Like what?" I asked.

"Let's switch identities. You be me. And I'll be you. Let's see how long we can fool everyone."

"I don't know if it's such a great idea." My voice trailed off.

"Come on. It'll be fun!" Ari gave my arm a friendly punch.

Wait a minute. Maybe it is a great idea, I thought.

Maybe this was my chance to become a different, braver person. Maybe by pretending to be someone else I could actually do it.

"Okay," I said. "Let's switch."

I gave Ari my backpack and he gave me his. We agreed to switch duffel bags too.

The driver drove up a grassy tree-covered hill and stopped.

"Here we are," the bus driver announced. "Last stop. Camp Full Moon. Everybody off."

Art gave me his baseball cap as we left the bus. I put it on the same way he wore it backwards.

"I'm Art now," I reminded myself as I climbed down the steps. "I'm Art."

But can I really be a whole new person?

# 3

## "M

ore camp kid. A big man with a big, round belly gave me a slap on the back. He barely knuckled me to my knees. He spun my cap around and nearly twisted off my head!

"Who is that?" whispered to Ari when the big man moved on.

"I got a note Lou," Ari whispered back. "I saw his picture in the camp brochure. He runs Camp Earth House."

Camp Lou looked older than my dad. He wore actual worn-in jeans that sat halfway down his long nose. He had a really bushy mustache and crazy eyebrows that grew straight out except for a fringe of black hair above his ears. he was practically bald.

He wore the same camp T-shirt as the bus

driver. But it looked much better on the driver. The T-shirt barely covered Uncle Lou's huge stomach.

He had on a pair of khaki shorts, brown sandals, and white socks pulled up to his knees. One of his socks had a hole in it. I could see his big toe sticking out.

In his hand he held a clipboard that he rested on his belly.

"Okay listen up," Uncle Lou bellowed. "There's a place for everything. And everything in its place. Know what I mean?"

No one answered him.

"Full Mooners — stand over here," Uncle Lou pointed to his right. "New Mooners stand over here," Uncle Lou pointed to his left.

"What are we?" I whispered to Ari.

"We must be New Mooners," he guessed.

I gazed around the camp as everyone gathered into groups. A row of small cabins, all painted green, circled a sparkling blue lake. A diving board rose over one end of the lake. At the other end of the lake, a wooden dock and six canoes bobbed in the water.

Off to the side I saw a long cobblestone building. Probably the mess hall. And next to that stood a baseball diamond.

The camp was surrounded by thick woods. Archery targets hung on some of the trees.

"All Mooners, follow me!" Uncle Lou marched us toward the lake.



The ground was covered with a dark carpet of pine needles. It made the air smell sweet and piney.

Jackie ran stopped at the row of cabins.

He looked and hunted from his clipboard and at an unassuming little hut.

"Not happy for the camera who got that one."

As Jackie ran to the cabin he stood back in the woods. He was puzzled, with one end sinking into the ground. Most of the windows were broken. The sides of the roof shingles were missing. A wooden sign over the door said CHEROKEE. A sign above the door said "This is Minn." Jackie ran shouted out my name.

I was about to answer but Ann cut me off. "No!"

He raised his hand.

Jackie ran checked his clipboard. "Cherokee cabin." He nodded across the cabin in the woods.

Jackie ran out a groan.

"How Mooners always get the Cherokee cabin."

A kid with bright red hair, freckles, and big hazel eyes leaned over and whispered. "It's the worst cabin in the whole camp."

Oh, great. I'll probably be in that cabin too, I thought.

"Maybe it's okay on the inside," I said, staring at the crooked building.

"The inside is nothing like the outside," the kid said. "Let's go!"

Ann groaned louder.

"Noah Ward," Uncle Lou called out.  
"Apache cabin?" The red-haired kid shouted to Uncle Lou.

"Right-o, Noah."

"I know I'd be in Apache," Noah said to me.  
"I've been coming here forever. I know I'd get the best cabin!"

"Ari Davis," Uncle Lou called.

I raised my hand.

"Let's see," Uncle Lou peered over his glasses, skimming his clipboard. "Ah, Here you are, Apache cabin."

Huh?

"How did you get into the best cabin?" Ari groaned. "You're a New Winner too."

"I-I don't know," I said.

Ari stared at the Apache cabin. It was the closest cabin to the mess hall. Its wooden shingles were coated with fresh green paint. White shutters covered the windows. It even had a porch.

This isn't fair, I thought. I should have been the one assigned to the Cherokee cabin.

But Ari didn't say anything about switching back. So I didn't, either.

"Hey, you're Ari Davis?" Noah slapped me a high five. "Wow! Okay!"

Noah turned to two guys standing next to him. Ben. Jason! We're gonna be in our bunk!"

"Hey! We're gonna be Ari!" Ben cheered. "All right!"

ten-year-old and nearly ten-year-old brown  
hair.

"But Arl! How slapped me a high five  
Arl! Is the team?" Again showed Ben out of  
the way which was easy for him.

Arden was built like a basketball player. He had  
a long arm and legs. His blond hair combed  
over his forehead.

He was happy for the high five.

"Arl! Arl! Arl! the three guys showed  
up with him. They were  
wondered  
a moment at Arl. He didn't look happy.

"They're Arl's and the joke. I thought. Maybe  
didn't tell me about the switch Arl and  
back.

"Arl! Arl! Arl! I'd just over the line.

But before I knew what was happening, he  
was in the air and up in his shoes.

"Arl! Arl! Arl! they showed up.

What is going on? wondered as they walked  
in off the water bank.

Why are they so glad to see Arl?

# 4

"H

ey, this place is pretty cool." The guys lowered me from their shoulders. I glanced around the cabin.

It had two bunk beds. Two small dressers. And a poster of Black Widow hanging on one wall. A dart board hung on another wall.

"Where is the counselor's bunk?" I asked.

"Apache cabin doesn't get a counselor." Noah said. "I told you. Apache cabin is the best!"

"I feel sorry for your friend Dustin," Jason shook his head. "The mosquitoes in this cabin will eat him alive."

"The mosquitoes aren't so bad," Noah disagreed. "The bedbugs are worse."

Mosquitoes? Bedbugs? Ari probably hates me by now, I thought. But this was his idea. Not mine, I told myself, trying not to feel guilty.

"I'll give you your duffel. I'll help you unpack  
it. I'll assist my duffel and assist emptying it  
out on the floor of drawers. I'll see  
things are neat for you. Aye."

Whe and up took out as he took my T-shirts and  
socks. He took them and placed them neatly in the  
drawers.

"What with these guys?" wondered again. Are  
they to put in everyone?

Whe and up and Mudd put my stuff away. I saw  
a couple of the other guys were really great.

A door in a small window opened.

One of the desktop birds wasn't in back of her.  
The other was in the darkest corner of the  
room.

"That one will describe to me. I thought it  
was the best one. I've seen a couple of

others since. I hope they're good. I'll  
try to be the best one in the

room when it's dark here.

"I've got you can't sleep. I'm not!" I said. I  
said. "I'm not!" I said.

"That's your best. I'm not!" I said. I  
said. "I'm not!" I said. "The best one in the room."

"And you're not!" I said. "I'm not!"

"I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!"

"I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!"  
I said. "I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!"

"I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!"

"I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!" I said. "I'm not!"

passed to me. As I unwrapped it, he guided me over to a big trunk.

"Look inside," he said.

I opened the lid and peered in. "Whoa!" The trunk was filled to the top with candy bars, soda, chips, and cookies.

"It's all for you," Jason grinned.

"Huh? For me?" I repeated, amazed.

"Yep." Jason plunged his hands deep into the trunk. He shoved handfuls of candy at me. "You the man! Anything you want—just tell us."

"Anything," Ben repeated. "You just tell us."

"We can't believe how lucky we got. We can't believe you're in our cabin." Noah pumped a fist in the air.

"Why? What's going on, guys?" I asked.

The cabin fell silent.

The smiles faded from their faces.

No one moved. No one said a word. They stood there, staring at me strangely.

Jason lowered his eyes to the floor.

Ben faked his arms across his chest.

The room was so silent, I could hear my wrist watch ticking.

I shoved my hands into my pockets. I shifted my weight from one foot to the other, waiting for someone to say something.

Finally, Noah spoke. "You know why you're here, right?" he said quietly. "You know what you have to do? Right, Ari?"

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

to the end of the line

# 5

"Um—

—where are we going?" I asked Noah, but night

"Just follow us," he said.

Noah, Ben, and Jason led me out of the cabin. I glanced at the cabins around the lake. At the trees edging the woods. All black shadows now.

"Let's go back to the cabin," I said. "I'll get my flashlight."

"We don't need a flashlight," Ben said. "We know where we're going."

Um—where are we going?" I asked again, crying not to sound frightened.

"You'll see." Jason walked behind me. He gave me a shove from behind. "Keep walking."

We circled the lake. I heard the wind drone of insects. It was too dark to see them. But they seemed to be everywhere. Flitting in the trees



branches above me. Nothing in the place to my  
left.

Heard something. Clumping. Shuffling.  
swarmed a mosquito. Her buzzed in my ear.  
Where are they taking me? My heart began to  
flay.

Kash marched us across the front of the mossy  
hall.

As we neared the corner of the long vol-  
canic building, an orange glow lit up the night  
sky.

It was campfire. Not much to report.

"It's Camp Pull Block, madison. Men said.  
"We always have a campfire the first night of  
winter."

The orange blaze in the middle of a circle of  
men. The whole group was aware. All the  
camps and all the mountains. Even the wind.

It was a miracle. The fire. We sat cross-legged  
in the grass. Picking hot dogs and chugging down  
from punch.

On the side, a long picnic table was piled high  
with a mountain of food.

"Sit right there." Kash pointed to a log stump  
on the ground. "We'll get you something to eat."

I didn't want to sit by myself. Glanced around  
for Art, but I couldn't find him in the crowd of  
mountains.

"I'll go with you," I said. I jumped up and  
nodded for the food table.

"No way," Jason declared. "We'll bring you plenty of stuff to eat. Relax."

The guys returned with hot dogs, juice, and fries. Before I finished my first hot dog, Noah jumped up and got me another one.

They stared at me as I ate.

"Everything okay?" Ben asked. "Do you need more mustard?"

"No, thanks," I said.

"Did I put too much mustard on your hot dog?" Noah jumped up again. "I'll wipe it off for you."

"Everything's great. Really," I said.

I bit into my second hot dog — and a giant bee landed on it.

I almost let out a shriek.

But the guys were staring at me.

I stifled my scream. I tried to slow my pounding heart.

I'm An now. I reminded myself. I'm a different person. I'm not afraid of bees.

I took a deep breath — then brushed the bee away.

But another bee began circling us. Then another.

Then dozens of them.

It was as if someone had upset a hive — and now the bees were upset with us!

They dove at the food. Circled the open juice bottles. Settled in the fries.

They swarmed around my head

It was my worst nightmare.

I wanted to run.

I'm Armin. I stared down at two bees buzzing  
around my hot dog. I'm not afraid of bees. I'm not  
afraid.

A... "The rest are coming out to me. As he  
walked up to us he scratched his arms. Then his  
legs. Then his arms again.

Dustin: "I've been looking for you!" I said. I  
dropped the hot dog and leaped to my feet.

"We'll go right back. Noah stops. "We're going  
to get you some juice.

And marshmallows." Jason adds. "I'll wash  
them for you. How do you like them? Black and  
cherry... or warm and gooey?

I... cherry... hot.

"How about your marshmallows?" Armin asked  
in disbelief. He pulled my sleeve. "Look, Dustin, I  
don't think he's working. Wait... switch quick." He  
scratched his cheek.

"Can't we do it just a little easier?"

He shook his head no. "This isn't fair. My cabin  
is the best. There's a hole in the roof. The floor  
sticks from rot. And the mosquitoes are crawling  
with fleas." He scratched his head.

ugh Please... walk a step away from him.

"I know it isn't fair. We'll switch back in a few  
days. I'm having so much fun being you. Please," I  
squealed. "Just a few more days."

"Give me a break," Ari said, bending down to scratch his ankles. "I think my fleas have fleas."

"Pleasee just a few more days," I pleaded.

Ari let out a sigh. "Okay. But just a few more days."

He glanced over at the food table, where Noah, Ben, and Jason were piling my plate high with food.

"I should be the one getting the special treatment—not you," he complained.

"Why do they like you so much?" I glanced over at the guys.

Ari shrugged. "I don't have a clue."

"Hey, Dustin," one of Ari's bunk mates called out to him. "I'm ready."

"That's Melvin," Ari groaned. "I have to go. He wants to show me his shoe lace collection."

Ari shuffled away, scratching the back of his neck.

I sat down on the ground, waiting for the guys to return.

I glanced at a kid I didn't know. He sat a few feet away from me, stuffing a handful of Bies into his mouth.

Two beers landed on his plate.

He stared down at them.

A slow smile spread across his face.

Then, with one swift move, he scooped the beers up in the palm of his hand.

He lifted his hand to his ear, listened, & the  
stopped bee buzz wildly.

Then he brought his hand to his lips

He popped the bee into his mouth and swal-  
lowed.



**D**id I really see that? barked hard. Did that kid really swallow was bees?

I shook my head. No. He didn't swallow bees, I told myself. Nobody swallows bees. It hurt as he a hot dog. Two small chunks of hot dog.

Yo! Ninners! Gather round! Uncle Lou stood in front of the campfire. "You know what they say: Time waits for no one! So . . . let's get started."

Start when? I wondered.

I sat in front of the circle of stones and stared into the fire. I watched the orange-and-yellow flames lick the air. I listened to the sharp crackle of the firewood as it burned.

I took a deep breath, breathing in the fire's woody smell.

Maybe sleep-away-camp isn't going to be so bad, I thought. As long as I can be Ari.

"Welcome to the camp for our anniversary" all Moons  
welcome. "Welcome to the camp for our anniversary."

The oggled his shorts up over his top belly. Then  
he pulled a whistle out of his up and gave a long low  
dive.

All the campers stood up. They threw back  
a head and howled at the moon. Then they  
shouted "Oh Moons! Oh Moons! Let him  
in for the N & M & NERs. Then he all  
looks right."

Art sat down behind me. "This is a really  
friendly camp," he leaned forward and whispered  
in my ear. "I bought new campers over the top and  
a whole lot of dirt."

"And... special welcome for Art Davis  
and Lee pumped in that is the air.  
Look!

Art Art Art. the whole camp cheered.  
My cheeks grew hot.

Art Art Art. my cheeks grew hot. Their  
first pressing he might wear sharp teeth.

"Are we alone here?" No one wanted.

"What is it? We're all here? No one here? I want  
to go."

They should be cheering for me. Art leaped  
forward again. "This isn't fair," he whispered. "I  
tell you."

"We'll watch you," said the oggled.

A call about midnight extended a bench over to  
the fire. He had looked out and a long piece of wood

his two front teeth. He set the bench down next to Uncle Lou.

"Mate, one of us has to lose sixty pounds," Uncle Lou joked. Then he lowered himself onto the bench.

"I think Uncle Lou is getting ready to tell us the story," Ben said.

The campers grew quiet.

"What story?" I asked.

But I didn't listen to the answer. I heard a rushing sound from the woods.

I turned and gazed into the dark trees that now surrounded the campfire.

Something was out there.

I saw a pair of red glowing eyes. Animal eyes shining through the trees.

Then I saw a flash. Another pair of glowing eyes. Then another flash.

Dozens of red glowing eyes. Flickering in the woods. Staring at us.

A shiver ran down my spine as I watched the dark woods flicker with the eerie light.

What's out there? I wondered.

Whatever they are, I realized, they've got us completely surrounded!



# 7

"T

his is the legend of The Sorcerer  
note I am began

Everyone grew silent

The campfire crackled behind me I said

The voice was low But I could hear her perfectly

The campers sat utterly still, leaning forward slightly, listening closely

My eyes traced the words lit by glowing animal eyes flickering among the trees

I wanted to ask one of the guys about their Asa if he knew who was out there But Noelle, Ben and Jason were leaning forward in concentric arcs on their feet

I turned away from the flashing red eyes

tried to forget that they were out there watching and staring at us

"When the full moon rises that's when he comes." Uncle Lou's voice grew lower.

"Who comes?" I whispered to Noah. "Did I miss something?"

"Shhhh." Noah placed his fingers to his lips. "Listen. Listen carefully. Ari."

"Come back with me." Uncle Lou closed his eyes. "Travel back twenty-five years to a sunny day in July. Opening day of a brand-new camp.

"A camp that should never have been built, the local people said. They knew the danger. But no one would listen to them.

"Campers arrived all day long. They unpacked their bags and crunks, laughing. Taking over the big campfire gazed for that night. A big grand-opening celebration.

"And it was a big day for Johnny Grant. His first day at sleep-away camp.

"Have fun!" Johnny's father ruffled his son's curly brown hair. "See you in August!"

"Johnny's mother kissed him good-bye.

"She didn't know what was about to happen. How could she? Nobody knew."

"What didn't they know?" I heard Ari ask someone.

Someone shushed him.

"Finally the sun set," Uncle Lou continued. "It was a warm summer evening. A full moon hung in the sky. The lake seemed to glow under its soft, shimmering golden light.

Uncle Lou spoke. "glanced over at the lake and gasped. The lake was glowing. Quoted up into the sky. at the lightning bugs here.

"This is just a story," said myself. "by couldn't help it." started whisper.

"A campfire started." Uncle Lou went on. "campers gathered around it. Twisting necks. gillies. He expected to be here. He expected to be the first campers at a brand-new camp. camp full of them.

A soft murmur ran through the campers. Uncle Lou waited for everyone to quiet down. Then he continued.

"At first everyone stood. He first blew down the candles set out lanterns. The campers set among the glowing lights. as they sang camp songs. a pack of red faces appeared in the woods.

"They quickly made their way to the forest's edge. He quietly. in one breath. said.

"They started out from the trees. climbed up to be campers."

thought about the twinkling eyes in the woods. But I was too young to see if they were still. here kept my eyes on Uncle Lou.

Uncle Lou took a deep breath.

"He brings campers. wanders away from the camp fire. So happy to be at camp. He eager to explore. He headed for the forest.

"A few kids saw him leave. But none after him to him. No one stopped him.

"Suddenly, a cry rang out from the trees. A voice screaming, 'Help me!' A tortured scream. A scream of pain.

"Everyone ran into the woods.

"They saw the foxes

But one of the foxes wasn't really a fox.

"It was The Snatcher.

"The local people know all about The Snatcher. An evil creature that took the form of a fox. It hid among them and preyed on the woods. Searching for its next victim.

"And now Johnny knew about The Snatcher too. His first day of camp — was his last. He was never seen again.

"Beware of The Snatcher." Uncle Lou whispered. "It can take any form. And it's watching. Always watching."

Uncle Lou opened his eyes. "Okay. Story's over."

I gazed around the campfire at the campers. At their terrified faces.

Why do they look so frightened?

I was scared too. But ghost stories are supposed to be scary. Aren't they?

"That was a good one," I heard one of the new campers say. "Uncle Lou tells great horror stories."

"The story is true," one of the counselors warned. "You'd better be careful. One kid van-

also every year from this camp. Taken away by  
the skater and never seen again.

"Yes, right. The skater laughed. "Look at  
me. I'm shaking."

The skaters slowly drifted away from the  
campfire.

Drifted back to their bunks.

Woke up he saw the skater. He saw the  
skater and the

When I started to run away from the  
skater grabbed me from behind.

He is serious. But a hand caught me  
and up my mouth.

Kicked and twisted. But I couldn't break  
free.

The hands gripped me tightly.

And dragged me roughly back into the woods.

# 8

"Let me go!" I struggled to cry out.  
But the hand over my mouth  
pressed harder. I pressed my open hand against my  
teeth.

Clicked & twisted.  
But I wasn't strong enough.  
was dragged deeper into the woods  
Out of sight of the glowing campfire.  
"Okay. Let him go," a voice whispered.  
The hands fell away.

I whirled around and stared into Jason's  
eyes. Ben and Noah stood beside him.

"Sorry. Ask. Hope I didn't hurt you," Jason apolo-  
gized.

realized that my legs were trembling.  
"Why did you drag me out here?" I shouted, try-  
ing to hide my fear.

"We want to talk to you. Now! soon. We have  
make sure no one hears us. Hugh's eyes darted  
back to me.

"What's so important?" asked  
he took a step toward me. "We have to talk to  
you about The Separation."

"Why?"

"That dumb story?" I said.

"What are you saying that?" Ben asked.

"Because that's what it is. Just a dumb camp  
story," explained.

"Oh, get it. I can't smile at me. "You're talk-  
ing about it with us."

"Are you? Are you? Are you? Are you?" Ben  
demanded.

"I didn't answer. I stayed down at my feet. I  
kicked a rock in the dirt."

"You told us you understood. South stepped  
around on the porch this afternoon. You  
said you knew what you had to do." Hugh's eyes  
narrowed. The muscles in his face tightened.

"Stop looking so hard on him. Just try to calm  
South down. We know. Right?"

"I don't know." Hugh took another step toward  
me.

"What are you going to do?" My head began to  
hurt. "What are you going to do?"

"Back to my car," I said, and in a voice I  
The car moved forward  
stumbled. The car moved

What do they want? My heart began to pound.  
 I quickly glanced around.  
 The woods were dark.  
 We were totally alone out here.  
 They stepped closer  
*If I scream, will anyone hear me?*  
 "You the man, Art," Ben said. "You're the one!"  
 They stepped closer and I ran.  
 darted through the trees, heading for the cabin.  
 I ran as fast as I could searching for the  
 clearing. Searching for the lake. Searching for the  
 moon light.  
 But I couldn't find any sign of camp.  
 I stopped. Spun around.  
 Nothing but trees.  
*Where is the camp?*  
*Did I get turned around?*  
*Where should I run?*  
 The woods were filled with mosquitoes. They  
 swarmed around my face. Flew into my eyes.  
 Stung their stingers into my neck. my cheeks  
 I started to run again.  
 Mouth open. Panting hard.  
 Swatting mosquitoes  
 I ran into a cloud of gnats. They flew into my  
 mouth. My ears  
 I shook my head wildly.  
 run and run.  
 A sharp pain stabbed my side.



I scowled, gulped at Rabbit's pain in my  
side.

I hear the snap of a twig behind me and  
froze.

I slowly turned around and stared into the  
eyes of a fox.

A red fox.

Parting hungrily.

Staring back at me with gleaming eyes.

# 9

I stumbled back  
I kept my eyes on the fox  
The Snatcher  
The words floated into my mind  
Just a silly story, I told myself. Just a silly camp  
story.  
Another pair of glowing eyes moved among the  
trees  
Then another.  
All around me, the woods shimmered in red  
light.  
The eerie light grew brighter as the foxes  
closed in.  
My chest tightened  
I stared into a bright pair of eyes. Brighter than  
all the rest. Red-hot, intense as laser light.  
*Are those the eyes of The Snatcher?*

Another pair of eyes looked down by  
a tiny lamp.

My chest ached. My clothes were a sea of red  
and white.

There were glowing red eyes everywhere I  
turned.

Was it history? Or was it just history?

I spun away. This is men.

But I froze at the sound of an angry snarl.

And then, in a moment of horror as a fox leaped in, he  
in. I knew a power.

Opened its jaws in an ugly grin.

And started to move across my chest.

# 10

I heard a loud *RIP* as the sharp claws tore through my T-shirt.

"Help me!" I choked out.

The snarling fox fell back. Jumped up quickly. Prepared to attack again.

Behind him, I saw the other foxes. evil eyes glowing, move toward me. Heads lowered. they uttered low, menacing growls as they looped silently over the ground.

"Help!" I cried out. "Someone – help me!" But my shouts were smothered in the angry snarls.

The fox leaped again. Its claws raked my T-shirt.

The force of its body sent me sprawling onto my back.

The other foxes attacked. They jumped on me, snapping their jaws, clawing wildly.

resumed again.

Twisted my body. Tried frantically to squirm away.

"Ain't that am."

I recognized Noah's voice.

I saw him bursting through the trees, swinging

a thick tree branch. I was aware at the same time  
glanced at them. Looked at them.

Was smiling. He knows or knows how to  
smile.

When he was sure they were all gone. Noah  
tripped the branch and helped me up.

My legs trembled. Grumbled his words to myself  
myself.

"What? Are you okay?" he asked.

Shook my self out. My shirt was still wet.

My don't were ripped. I was covered in it.

Are you standing? Come out here please. You're  
not dead. In the "Oh, that's better" but yet. Noah  
shook his head.

I felt dizzy.

I didn't understand what he meant.

I looked again at the trees. Noah. "What  
are you talking about?"

"You really don't know?" His eyes widened in  
surprise. "But we told you. You, the man." He  
praised. "You're the one."

But saying that. "I demanded. "What do you  
mean?" "Don't know what you're talking about."  
Let me be my."

"Okay. Okay." Noah stared at me. "If you really don't know, I'll tell you."

"I really don't know," I declared.

"You were chosen, Ari," he said. "You are The Freshman's victim this year."

# 11

"I started a gun. You're joking, right?"  
He didn't reply.

"Nah. This is just a joke. You play on me sometimes, right?" he asked.

He shook his head. He turned and began walking through the trees.

"How 'bout it?" cried. I grabbed his shoulder. "Tell me the truth!" I demanded.

His eyes looked at mine. "Honestly, old man, the truth, Aye," he whispered. "The Squawha is dead. And we've been chosen. The Squawha must have a victim every summer."

"But...but..." I protested.

"This year it's you. Nah and softly. He turned and began walking again.

As we reached the edge of the woods, I could see the lake through the trees. The lake grew

ing strangely under the full moon. Just as it did in  
Uncle Lou's story.

I thought about the foxes. The red foxes with  
the flickering eyes.

Uncle Lou's story had red foxes in it too.

Is the story true? I wondered. Is Ari the next  
victim?

But I'm not Ari.

Now I have no choice. I have to tell them the  
truth.

"Yo, guys. We're back," Noah pulled the cabin  
door open.

"Hey, man. You look horrible." Ben stared at my  
torn T-shirt and shorts.

James opened his mouth of candy. He took a soda  
for himself and threw one to me.

My hand shook as I popped the lid. I took a big,  
long gulp.

"Listen, guys. I have to tell you something," I  
started.

They stood quietly, waiting for me to go on.

"I'm not Ari," I confessed.

I told them the whole story. About meeting Ari  
on the bus. About agreeing to switch identities.

"Ari thought it would be a great joke. So did I.  
But it's not funny anymore."

No one said a word.

They stared hard at me.

"Okay. You're Dustin," Noah said. "And I'm  
Uncle Lou!"



Yash grabbed Jasim's pillow and stuffed  
under his shirt. "See? I can make you!"

Yash's insight was so funny he ate his words  
up.

You know what they say. Youth will grow and  
like milk and if you spit stronger up in the air  
your head will go out.

Yash and Ben bowed with laughter.

When a woman is feeling something is  
wrong in me. You can't be stupid."

"Why not?" asked

"Because in Duxon!" Ben started reaching  
his hand and legs. He slapped his dress per-  
haps to kill bugs. "See? in Duxon!"

Yash and Ben "open" in serious

look. And Yash wrapped his arm around my  
shoulder. "You have to be brave."

But I'm not! I'm stupid. You have to be  
lie in me. In Duxon. I'm telling you the truth.

"But I won't work." Yash shook his head.

You won't get away from The Smother by per-  
forming to be someone else."

It was a sight to see when they weren't going to  
believe me.

We all climbed into her.

Ben never lost the light.

"Hey! Look out! Give me back my pillow!"

Jasim called it back.

The two guys fought over the pillow. Laughing  
for a great time.

was still awake after the pillow fight stopped.  
I was still awake after everyone had fallen asleep.  
I'm going to find Ari in the morning. I decided.  
And I'm going to let him know to switch back.  
Is that a terrible thing to do to Ari? I wondered.  
But Ari wants to switch back, I decided. He  
wants to live in the good cabin. He can't wait to be  
Ari again. So I'm going to let him.  
I closed my eyes.  
But I didn't feel sleepy.  
I sat straight up as I heard a scratching noise.  
Soft at first. Then louder.  
Animal scratches.  
Animal scratches on the window screen.  
Something was out there. clawing to get in.  
How?   
The Satchel?  
I pulled the covers over my head.  
Tomorrow I'll switch back with Ari. And every-  
thing will be okay, I told myself.  
I didn't try to fall asleep.  
I knew I wouldn't be able to until I was  
Dusale again.

# 12

"O

kay. And a man to send the  
joke.

We sat in the street hall eating breakfast. Art  
was stuffing pancakes in his mouth, two at a time.  
A whole 'fist was out of it.

Let's switch back. I cheered.

Art glanced up from his plate. The way. There it  
was. I'm in.

What are you talking about? asked in sur-  
prise. You said you wanted to switch back. So  
do you want to?

Art stuffed his last two pancakes in his mouth.  
Syrup dripped down his chin. "I'm in. And  
nobody's out of it."

He picked up his plate. He's back. He's  
going to get more.

What's up with you? I wondered. Panic more

my stomach churn. Yesterday he couldn't wait to switch back.

Ari returned with a plate piled high with pancakes. I stared at him as he ate.

"Oh, I get it!" I cried. "You heard — didn't you? You heard that you're supposed to be The Statcher's next victim."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Ari jumped up. "Come on. The senior campers are meeting at the boathouse. We're going to be out."

"Why? What's happening at the boathouse?" I asked.

"We're going kayaking. Remember?"

I didn't remember. I wasn't even sure what a kayak was, exactly.

Ari and I argued the whole way to the boathouse. No matter what I said, he refused to switch back.

"Two men to a boat! Heave ho!" Uncle Lou stood in front of the boathouse, bellowing orders.

Hen, Jason, and Noah were already there. So were most of the other senior campers. They carried the kayaks out of the boathouse and headed toward the woods.

"You guys are late," Uncle Lou shook his head. "Don't you know the early bird catches the worm?"

Ari and I lifted one of the long, narrow boats.

"Why are we going into the woods with these?" I asked.

"There's a road, but cuts through the woods. Art told me. "Don't you know anything?"

"I know who I am. I missed the end of the boat. I'm Dustin. Art wants to go back to seeing Justin."

"What's the problem here, guys?" asked Tom, a blonde with glasses.

"I'm not Art!" blurted. "I'm Dustin. Art and I switched names on the bus. Now he won't switch back."

"Is that true?" Tom's face peered up at over his eyeglasses.

"No way," Art said. "Our names."

Art pulled a wallet out of his back pocket. "See? Here's my ID. It has my name and address on it. I live in Marlboro 2422 Westbrook Road."

Justin and took the ID. "Yep. That's what mine is."

"I don't see," says him," blurted. "That's my wallet."

"Look," Art pulled the T-shirt off. "Here the name on my shirt." He showed the shirt at Justin and Tom.

"Dustin Minnion. I see. Justin is right."

"My mom wrote my name in everything," Art smiled. "Want to see my underwear?" he started to drop his pants.

"That won't be necessary. Dude up."

Justin and pulled up pants. He placed his hands

arm around my shoulders. "You've got to be brave Ari. Don't try to put another boy in your place."

"I'm not!" I insisted. "You've got to believe me — I'm really not Ari!"

Uncle Lou took a deep breath. "You know what they say, son. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Know what I mean?"

I shook my head. "No, I don't."

"It's simple." Uncle Lou narrowed his eyes at me. "He's a wimp."

I glanced over at Ari.

He and another kid were duelling with the boat paddles, laughing it up.

He's having a great time, I thought. And I'm going to be snatched away in his place.

It's not fair.

No one believes I'm me.

There must be something I can do.

But what?

# 13

**W**he earliest all-boats drive to the river.  
The kayaks were ceremonial boats  
with a work of art in the prow. It is one thing to  
sit in them.

They were on file with Art but the other  
guys are not as interested. So he is alone.

“You forget your seat. Art was a man  
of his word.”

“Your seat is not in the boat. It is not in the boat.  
The seat is in the kayak. It is not in the boat.  
of his boat.”

“You are pretending to be a man.” He said him.

“I am not pretending. He smiled.

“Then, we are back.”

“Okay, we are pretending.” He smiled.

Everyone pretended that he was a man. He was  
not. He was a man. He was a man. He was a man.

gnats that swarmed around us. So I tried not to complain.

I sat behind Ari. I'd never been in a kayak before. I wanted to watch the way he paddled.

I got the hang of it pretty quickly.

And I was starting to have fun.

The six Camp Full Moon boats glided along the water. It was kind of peaceful, gliding down the river. Slipping through the forest, listening to the soft splashes our paddles made.

And then I heard another sound.

Voices.

From the woods on the other side of the river.

"Is there another camp over there?" I called to

Nate, a counselor who rowed the next boat.

"No," he stated firmly. "There are no other camps around here for now. Keep paddling."

"Did you hear the voices?" I asked Ari.

"I thought I did," he answered.

We paddled some more until we heard the scream.

A shrill, horrifying scream.

My heart skipped a beat as the scream rang through the forest.

"Who... who's in the woods?" I asked.

"It must be The Snatcher," Nate said. "Keep close together guys."

Was he joking?

I studied his face.

Waited for him to smile.



He didn't

I tightened my grip on the pistol — you and  
other screams rang out,

A sharp scream — put off him, play with a gar-  
gling choking sound

passed through his throat

and some long went through his legs,

While a cat's growl was

I squinted harder

At the man's moaning — was his

# 14

“Knock-knock.”

“Knock-knock.”

“Give me a break, Ari. I’m not in the mood for jokes.”

We were carrying the kayak back to the boat-house. After we heard the second scream, Nate decided it was best to turn back to camp.

It was midafternoon now. The sun hung high in the sky. It was blazing hot. And I was sweating.

“Knock-knock.”

“I asku forgot it.”

“Knock-knock.”

“Why doesn’t he just shut up?”

“Knock-knock.”

“If I answer you, will you shut up?”

Ari nodded eagerly.

“Who’s there?” I mumbled.

"Dustin.

"Dustin who?"

"Dustin is the written name." A's Outfield.

"You're right. . . at my end of the base drop. I  
lifted my navy-blue camp. All Mom's shirt and  
wore the sweat from my forehead. "Murry, if  
you're . . . told him and stomped away  
across the isomorphism. . . with her same kids  
playing baseball.

As I headed over to catch them, I saw a kid in  
he no could catch the ball.

I'd throw it as the second baseman.

The second baseman missed the ball.

When . . . was

The baseball flew right through him. . . passed  
through his chest and flew out his back.  
he catches caught the ball.

I squinted into the bright sun light.

I'm seeing things. . . told myself as he still was  
playing. . . eyes on my eyes. None of the players no  
was anything strange.

The pitcher warmed up and pitched.

The batter swung and out. He swung and  
missed. . . and shattered the catcher in the head.

You could hear the T's. . . oh for once.

The catcher didn't call.

He didn't see out.

The signaller the pitcher for a fastball.

I started back at the catcher. All the signs were

man. A trickle of sweat dripped down my forehead.

I'd better get out of the sun, I thought, heading for my truck.

I'm seeing crazy things.

# 15

**I** go in my bunk and pretend to be kids diving off the diving board. Splashing into the lake.

I was free-swing time.

I see I see you. You're up work is beginning.

Nothing left. But you know what you say. There's no sense in having your head in the sand.

"Yeah, right." I had no idea what he was talking about.

You never know what you can do till you try." I wonder what he

What are you? I wonder what he's doing. How are you going to get out of this mess?

Why didn't you and Jack listen to me? I was here and I saved me here.

With a scowl.

I'll make them listen to me  
I'll call them and tell them not to send Logan  
I'll tell them to come pick me up. That I'm in danger here. Real danger.  
I'll tell them to get me out of here right away.  
Okay, I thought. Problem Number One solved.  
That leaves Problem Number Two: Where is the phone?

"Yo!" Noah flung open the screen door. He was wearing his bathing suit, wet from swimming. As he crossed the colon, he left puddles on the floor.

"I've been looking for you. How come you're not swimming?"

"Don't feel like it," I replied glumly.

"Do you *know* how to swim?" Noah studied me.

"Of course I know how to swim. Not great," I admitted. "But I know how."

I jumped down from my bunk. "Where's the phone around here?" I asked.

"It's right outside the mess hall. It's a pay phone hanging on the side of the building."

"Great!" I started to the door.

"No. Not great," Noah called after me. "Campers aren't allowed to use it."

That night, I waited for Noah, Ben, and Jason to go to the mess hall for dinner and then I'd catch up with them.

I peered out my window and watched all the campers making their way to the mess hall.

When I was sure that everyone was inside,  
crept out of the cabin determined to use the  
pay phone.

approached the building quietly. Listened to  
the clattering of dishes. The clinking of glasses.  
The happy laughing voices.

I peered up at the mess hall window and stole a  
glance inside.

Yes. Dinner was under way.

I quickly made my way around to the side of the  
building and gasped.

No pay phone.

Noah ran to me.

Why? whispered. Why would he do that?

Oh. Well. Maybe the phone is on the other side,  
realized.

I walked around the back of the mess hall, I  
ducked behind the windows so no one would see  
me.

smelled hamburgers and french fries. My  
stomach rumbled with hunger.

But I couldn't eat.

I had to call home.

This phone call was going to save my life.

I rounded the corner of the cobblestone building.  
Yes! There it was. The pay phone.

I dialed a bunch of change into the phone.

It felt like the sky was about to come  
falling down.

Had anyone been?

Whispered around. No one in sight.

I dialed my number  
What if no-one's home? I didn't think about that.  
I realized  
My stomach tightened as the phone rang.  
*Please be home*  
Another ring.  
Someone, pick up the phone.  
Another ring.  
"Hello?"  
It was Mom. Yes!  
I opened my mouth to speak — and a hand slid  
over my shoulder  
Reached the phone — and cut the connection.



# 16

I spun around to find Ari behind me. His eyes narrowed. "Who are you calling? You know I isn't allowed 'er."

"And you know I'm not Ari!" I cried. "I'm calling my parents. I'm going to tell them to come and get me."

"Oh. Why didn't you say so? Let me help you." Ari grabbed the receiver from my hand. He gave it a strong yank and ripped it off the cord.

"Here you go, buddy." He handed the receiver back to me. The wire dangled in the air. "Take it back in your cabin. Now you won't get caught."

"Why did you do that?" I shrieked. I threw the receiver on the ground.

"You can't go home." He slapped one on the cheek. "We need you, Ari. The camp needs you!"

"Stop calling me Ari!" I shoved him away.

"But you owe Ari. You the man. Hu-ha-ha!"

"Laugh. That's okay. I'll be the one laughing on Monday. Because I've got bad news for you!" I told him.

"Yeah, what?"

"Knock-knock," I said.

"Give me a break." Ari shook his head. "What's the bad news?"

"Knock-knock."

"You're such a baby. You don't have any bad news."

"Knock-knock," I repeated.

Ari couldn't stand it anymore. "Who's there?" he growled.

"Logan."

"Logan who?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" I said.

"You're a total guck," Ari said. "That's not a joke."

"You, it is." I said. "It's a joke. And the joke's on you. Monday!"

"Who's Logan?" Ari shoved me hard. I fell to the ground.

I grabbed his legs.

"Ooof." He fell on top of me.

"Give me back my shirt!" I clutched his T-shirt and yelled. "I want all my clothes back."

Ari climbed on top of me. He grabbed my arms and pinned them over my head. "What's the bad news. Tell me!"

I poked my eyes and heard him "yung. He slipped  
into a tree.

"On Monday my little brother is coming to  
camp," told him.

I stood up and brushed the dirt off my jeans.

And he'll tell everyone that I'm Lousy. The  
only one loser.

"No way!" Am charged at me. He knocked me  
down again.

We rolled around in the dirt. Am punched me in  
the stomach. I kicked him in the spine.

"What's going on out here?" Uncle Lou came  
strutting out of the mess hall. He yelled for Nate  
to come outside.

Nate pulled Am off me. Then he helped me up.  
"You'd better save your strength. Am. he said to  
me. "You're going to need it."

"I'll tell A. I'll tell Loumen. I'll tell EVERYONE."

"That joke's getting a little stale, kid," Uncle  
Lou said. "Why don't you just drop it?"

Am laughed.

"Just wait," said "Wait till Monday. You'll see.  
You'll see."

# 17

"Are you sure we're having a campfire tonight?" I glanced out the cabin window. "It looks like its going to rain."

"Then we'd better hurry," Noah said. He grabbed his sneakers and shoved his feet into them. "I have to win my bet."

"What bet?" asked.

"Noah bet us he could stuff twenty marshmallows in his mouth at once," Jason said, pulling his Camp Full Moon T-shirt over his head.

"Yeah. And we bet him that we could stuff thirty!" Ben bragged.

"Want to bet with us?" Ben asked. "How many do you want to try?"

"Oh, I don't know," I murmured. "I never really tried to stuff my mouth with anything."

I opened the cabin door and gazed up at the sky.

Dark storm clouds drifted across the full moon. A strong gust of wind nearly blew the door shut.

I gazed at the marshmallows in the jar. They glistened, having crashed into each other. Robbed and reeled, crunched against the wooden dock.

The campers were plunged out of their cabins. With their heads down, they pushed against the wind, making their way in the darkness.

Ben showed me out of the doorway. "Let's go. Before all the marshmallows are gone."

I followed the guys down to the campfire. A mob of kids already surrounded the food table.

Jason, Ben, and Noah elbowed their way through the crowd. Ben grabbed a basket of marshmallows. He stuffed at least ten in his mouth before Jason and Noah started.

"Come on, Ari!" Noah shoved four marshmallows into his mouth. "Go!"

"I can't think up," said as Ben stuffed ten more in his mouth. His cheeks swelled up. "I'll watch."

"Look out!" Melvin, the nerdy kid from Ari's bunk, cried. "He's going to spew!"

Ben turned into Melvin's face and hurled out his marshmallows all over the poor kid.

"Here!" Jason showed some marshmallows into my hand. "Your turn."

"Oh, later," I said, backing away.

I turned and hurried toward the campfire.

I watched black curls of smoke rise from the flames. Ben disappeared in the wind.

Tomorrow Logan will be here, I thought, staring into the flames. And I can go back to being Justin.

"Still want to call Mommy and Daddy?" Ari stepped up beside me. "Hey, I've got an idea." Ari pointed to the fire. "Why don't you send them smoke signals?"

"Just wait," I told him, walking away. "Just wait until tomorrow."

I made my way around to the other side of the fire. I found a place to sit on the ground, behind a group of kids roasting marshmallows.

"Jeremy, do you have an extra stick?" a blond-haired kid asked his friend.

Jeremy didn't answer him. He was too busy shoving marshmallows into his fingers, wearing them like rings.

The blond-haired kid stared down at the marshmallow in his hand.

Shrugged his shoulders.

Then plunged his arm into the fire.

I shut my eyes tight.

I didn't see that.

I opened my eyes.

"Are you crazy?" Jeremy yelled at the blond-haired kid. "If you don't have a stick, do it this way!"

Jeremy stuck his fingers into the flames.

Everyone laughed.

These kids are crazy, I thought. They're going to burn their hands off!

I jumped up.

Another key issue is communication between the group itself.

I watched in horror as he stuck our white head into the fire. James cracked around him. The marshmallows between his teeth began to blacken.

‘Something is wrong here’ have to get away I  
dozens burbled away from bed.

<sup>1</sup> 'Dien pake' = 'day work' 'Go dikong' = 'go home'

• took off running for the second.

have to make a plan, I decided as I moved  
bought the house I can't stay here. Not one more  
month.

The wind blew hard through the trees.

The new center awarded and created a

heard the rattling of thunder

pushed against the wind. It started through the trees, headed deeper into the woods.

The moon lit my way. But its light faded as the clouds rolled by.

The wind caught, blowing dirt up into my eyes.

I ran blindly through the street tripping over  
new roots. Strapping my arms against his rough  
back.

Running with my head down. Running without looking.

"Hey, what're you're going?" a girl asked  
not as awkward as he.

gave me an idea of the field he graduated with a third

FIELD.

She sat in the dirt, breathing hard.

The moonlight lit up the girl's face. She had blond hair tied in a braid that hung down to her waist. Freckles dotted her small nose.

She wore blue cutoff jeans and a yellow T-shirt. A shiny silver chain dangled around her neck.

She gazed up at me with a frightened look on her face.

Who is she? I wondered as I stared into her deep-brown eyes.

Where did she come from?



# 18

I took out my hand and helped the girl up. "Who are you? What are you doing out here in the middle of the woods?" asked.

She brushed dirt off the back of her shorts. "I'm from the girls' camp."

"Huh?"

"What girls' camp?"

A clap of thunder boomed over our heads.

"The girl didn't seem to hear my question. She gazed up at the sky, astonished."

"What girls' camp?" I asked again. "They told us there wasn't any other camp around here."

"They didn't want you to know," she replied.

"They're afraid boys will sneak over to our camp." She grabbed her book and dugged on it nervously.

"Where is the camp anyway?" I squinted through the trees.

"You can't see it from here," she said. "It's on the shore of the river."

A few drops of rain started to fall.

"I'd better go," The girl turned to leave.

"Wait a minute," I said. "What's your name?"

"Laura Carter," she answered. "And you're Ari, right?"

A chill ran down my spine.

I stared into her dark-brown eyes.

"How — how did you know that?" I stammered.

.19

"H

ow do you know my name?" a  
demanded

"I know a lot about you," she replied. "I know  
you hate bugs."

"How do you know that?" My voice shook.

"Don't get upset," she said. "I heard them teas-  
ing you."

"Who did you hear teasing me?"

"The other guys from your camp."

"When?" I demanded.

"When you were kayaking down the river. You  
didn't see me." She grabbed the silver chain  
around her neck and twisted it around her fingers.

"I was spying on you through the trees."

The rain started so close that it was like hammer.

"I really should go," she said. "I don't want to  
get drenched. Then they'll know I was out here."

"Who will know?"

"The counselors at my camp," she said.

"Why are you out here?" I asked her. "Why are you alone in the woods at night?"

"Because I hate them."

Laura seemed nice. But she wasn't exactly easy to talk to. "Who do you hate?" I asked her.

"Everyone and everything!" she muttered. "I hate all the other girls. I hate sleep-away camp. I hate it all."

She sighed. "I sneak away every night. And I walk in the woods. And I try to come up with a good way to escape."

She shrugged. "I haven't come up with a way yet."

"Aren't you afraid to be out here by yourself?" I asked. "Aren't you afraid of The Snatcher?"

Laura gasped.

"They tell you guys that story too? About a camper being snatched away every summer?"

I nodded.

"It's not true — is it?" Her whole body started to shake.

"I-I'm not sure," I stammered.

I felt awful. I didn't mean to scare her.

"I thought they made that story up," she said softly. "But if they tell you boys the same one — maybe it's true." Her lower lip trembled.

The leaves rustled behind us.

We both jumped.

I glanced behind me. Nothing there now.

"The one in question by reason," I said.

"Okay," her voice shook. "But, we'd better begin back."

"Look," said. "I'm sorry if I scared you. I know how you feel. About camp, I mean. I hate it too. I'm totally unhappy there."

"You are?" Her eyes opened wide. "Great!"

"That?"

"We can help each other escape!" Her face broke into an excited smile. "We can help each other get to the other side!"

"The other side of what?" I asked.

"The other side of the river. All we have to do is cross the river. And here's a highway nearby," she explained. "I was afraid to cross the river by myself. But now we can do it together!"

She grabbed my hand.

"Let's go!" She tugged me forward.

I can't go now, I thought. Logan is coming tomorrow. Can't leave him here by himself.

"Wait!" I pulled my hand free. "I can't do it alone."

"Oh?" Laura looked disappointed.

"Let's meet tomorrow," I suggested. "We'll plan our escape."

"Do you promise?" Her voice filled with doubt.

"We'll meet right here," said. "Do you think you can find this spot tomorrow?"

"No problem," she replied. "I'll wait here for you."

tree " She pointed to a tree trunk split down the middle. Then she said good-bye and hurried off toward her camp.

I headed down the trail. The rain started coming down hard.

I broke into a jog.

A bolt of lightning cut through the sky.

It lit up the woods for an instant.

But in that instant, I saw it.

A fox.

Running at the end of the trail. Head lowered. Body arched.

Staring hard at me.

# 20

**T**he whale strained its gaze for me  
I dove again. Barely breaching  
I stared into its eyes. There—yes. There: was  
something so human about them  
Something so familiar  
Oh, heart pounded  
I've never dove *deeper* before—directly  
The fox held me in its gaze  
What should I do? Should I try to make a run for  
it? Will he stop and ask me the minute I move?  
My heart pretends to have—though my chest  
was going to explode  
glaring down  
Now a rock  
Climbed up to a nearby island  
I took a deep breath, stripped the rock  
right off—then heaved it at the fox

The creature jumped back, startled. It uttered  
an angry hiss

Then scampered away.

I took off. I ran through the woods. Ran all the  
way back to camp.

The campfire was deserted now. The camp-  
grounds were dark. The cabins were all dark too.

I had missed lights. Just

I slipped quietly into the cabin and fell into bed.  
My heart still pounded.

Tomorrow is going to be a much better day. I  
told myself.

Tomorrow Logan will be here.

Tomorrow we'll both go home.

"What time is it?"

Sunlight filtered through the cabin window. I  
couldn't believe it was morning already.

I let out a loud yawn.

"Anybody know what time it is?" I sat up in bed.

The cabin was empty.

"Where is everyone?"

I jumped out of bed. And hurried to the window.

I saw some guys splashing in the lake.

Some of the younger kids were playing on the  
softball field.

What is everyone doing out so early? I won-  
dered.

I found my watch on the dresser. Eleven  
o'clock! Slept right through breakfast. Through



anchors practice. Through again. How could it be eleven o'clock?

I pulled on a pair of black shorts and a black T-shirt. I jammed my feet into my sneakers and ran outside.

Uncle Lou walked out of his cabin, heading down the hill, away from the lake.

"Uncle Lou! Wait up!" I yelled.

I raced after him. "My brother Logan is coming today!" I told him, out of breath. "Do you know what time the bus will be here?"

"It's already here, kid. That's where I'm headed."

"Great. This is really great! Now I can prove to you who I really am!"

Whichever you say, kid.

We headed down the hill together.

I saw the new uniforms empty out of the yellow pickup and three kids in a crowd, waiting to see Uncle Lou to greet them.

Spotlight kid, standing off to the side, watching us.

"There's my brother. The little kid in the orange T-shirt and the black baseball cap." I pointed out Logan's uncle Lou.

"Nice hat, kid." Uncle Lou nodded at Logan's cap. "I know what he says: if you want to get ahead, get a hat."

In "Fourteen" Logan said.

"Logan: I'm so glad to see you!" I cried. "Tel-

(Uncle Lou who I am) Tell him I'm Dustin, your  
cousin

Logan stared at me.

"Who are you?" Logan murmured. "You're not  
my brother. There's my brother over there."

He pointed to Ari.

"No, Logan — please!" I gasped.

But Logan ran over to Ari.

"How's it going, Dustin?" Logan slapped Ari a  
high five. "Who is that guy?" Logan asked, point-  
ing at me.

# 21

"Logan is my brother. Can we get  
to believe that, please, Lou?"  
deafened. "In a heartbeat."

I yelled at Lou. "Watch God die, veins in my neck  
tapping out."

All the new campers stared at me in shocked si-  
lence.

I told Lou I understood you too.

And now Logan stared at me.

Here comes," I heard someone say.

I sat down. In "I told you ask my shoulders  
in the big house." "You're wearing the new camp  
tee."

Looked deep, mouth shut, couldn't calm down.

As I walked toward the door, watched Logan  
walk off with him.

I shook my head. "I don't get it," I murmured.  
"Why is Logan doing this to me?"

"Listen to me, Ari." Uncle Lou started.

"I'm not Ari!"

"Listen!" Uncle Lou said firmly. "It's settled.  
No more talk about who you are, okay?"

"I'm not Ari!" I insisted.

Uncle Lou sighed. "Okay. Look at it this way. I  
think you're Ari. Everyone in camp thinks you're  
Ari. Dustin's brother, Logan, thinks you're Ari. So  
give us all a break. Just pretend that you're Ari."

"I'm Dustin!" I shouted. "I know you think I'm  
crazy. But I'm not. I'M DUSTIN!"

Uncle Lou ignored me. He turned to the new  
campers. "Okay, listen up," he bellowed. "Pull  
klouners! stand over here."

I wandered away in a daze.

Why did Logan do that to me? I wondered. I  
don't get it.

Feeling dizzy and frightened, I wandered down  
to the lake.

I watched some kids laughing and splashing in  
the water. They swam across the lake in a race.  
Then they all dived underwater.

I waited for them to pop up again.

The water's surface turned smooth.

The air grew quiet.

No sounds of laughter.

No splashing.

How can they all stay underwater so long?  
underwater. Where are they?"

I started to worry. No one can stay underwater  
this long.

I stared hard at the lake.

Where are you? Come back up. I started to  
panic.

My heart pounded in my chest.

Something's wrong. This isn't normal!

"Help!" I screamed as loud as I could. "Some-  
body, help! They're all drowning!"

# 22

**"T**hey're drowning! Somebody,  
help!" I screamed.

My eyes darted around the campground, frantically searching for someone to help me.

The baseball field was deserted.

Uncle Lou and the new campers were nowhere in sight.

*Where is everyone?*

*Where are the counselors?*

"Help!" I cried out again. "They're drowning!"

They'd been underwater for at least five minutes.

No hope.

No hope for any of them.

**SPLASH**

The swimmers all bobbed up to the surface of the water at once. Laughing. Splashing each other.

How did they do that? I gaped at them. No one can stay underwater that long. You can't.

There's something really wrong with this place and myself.

I'm getting out of here today, I decided.

But first I had to find Lagan.

I didn't have to look far for him. He and Ari walked out of the water. They began for he can now breathe on the other side of the water.

"Can we take a pair in one of them now?" Lagan was asking me, walking up to them.

"Not allowed. We must proceed with us," Ari told him. Then Ari spotted me. "Lagan, listen to this great knock-knock joke."

"Lagan doesn't want to hear your stupid jokes," I said.

Ari ignored me. "Knock-knock."

"Who's there?" Lagan asked.

"Lagan."

"Lagan who?"

"Lagan believe me, crazy he is!" Ari wanted to join.

Lagan fell into a fit of laughter.

I let out a sigh. "Let's get out of here," grabbed Lagan's arm.

"Leave me alone," Lagan yanked free. "You're not my brother. I don't even know you."

"Stop it, Lagan!" warned. "Lagan is sick."

I called Lagan away. Found a place behind the press box. Talk to him alone.

"What's going on?" I demanded. "Why did you say I wasn't your brother?"

Logan shrugged his shoulders.

"Answer me, Logan," I said through gritted teeth. "We're not moving from here until you tell me."

"Stop yelling at me," Logan pouted. "You scared."

"Huh?"

"What are you afraid of?"

"Art. He said he'd hurt me if I didn't lie about you," Logan finally admitted.

I felt sorry for Logan.

"You don't have to be afraid anymore," I told him. "Tonight we're going to leave camp. We're going home."

"I don't want to go home!" Logan jumped up. "I just got here. Why do we have to leave?"

"Because it's dangerous here."

"No, it's not. I just have to pretend you're not my brother."

I didn't want to tell Logan about The Scutcher. Or all the weird things I'd seen the kids doing around here. He was already scared. I didn't want to make things worse for him.

"Go to your bunk and unpack," I told him. "Everything will be okay. I'll see you later."

I sat by myself for a while and came up with a new plan. A pretty good one, too.



I'll meet Laura in the woods later. I decide. I won't take Logan with me. I'll go by myself.

Laura and I will escape to the highway on the other side of the river. We'll find a phone.

Then I call Mom and Dad and make them rescue me and Logan.

Now that I had the plan worked out, I felt a little better.

I decided to go to my cabin and wait until it was time to meet Laura.

I ran along the path that led to my bunk.

I saw a few kids up ahead holding bows and arrows. I recognized a couple of them from the mess hall. One kid was tall and skinny with black hair. His name was Todd.

Todd slipped the arrow into his bow.

He cocked him.

I followed his glance -- and gasped.

He was aiming at another camper. A short, chubby kid named Billy.

Billy stood with his arms outstretched, and he already had an arrow sticking out of his chest.

Billy was the target.

Todd pulled his arm back, and let the arrow fly. It flew straight into Billy's shoulder.

Billy didn't cry out. He didn't even flinch. Grinning, he started to pluck it out.

"Leave it there!" Todd called. "I want to see if I can shoot another one right underneath it."

I started to cry out — but Todd let another arrow fly fast.

He missed. It didn't hit Billy's shoulder. It flew right into Billy's forehead.

"Stop it!" I yelled. "You're sick!"

Todd and the other kids turned to me.

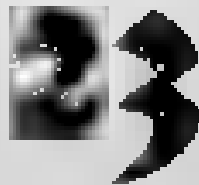
Giggling, they aimed their bows and arrows at me.

I turned and ran.

I charged into the woods to hide. To wait for nightfall. To wait to meet Laura.

I sat down on the ground and leaned up against a tree.

Will I find a way out of here? I wondered. Will I really escape this terrifying camp?



I peered up into the dark sky.  
The light of the full moon peeked  
through the leafy treetops.  
It was a bright thought  
I took off through the forest to meet Laura.  
The steady drone of crickets filled the woods.  
Their chirping seemed to follow me wherever I  
turned.  
I ran until I reached a fork in the path.  
Which way? Left or right?  
I searched for something that looked familiar.  
But I was surrounded by trees, and they all looked  
the same.  
I turned to the left  
followed the trail until it ended. Then I left  
the path and zigzagged through the woods.  
I hope I'm not late, I worried. What if Laura

leaves before I get there? I'll never find my way to  
the highway without her.

I ran faster, searching for the tree with the  
trunk split by lightning.

A buzzing sound made me stop. Bugs! A thick  
swarm of mosquitos.

They buzzed around my head. Stung my cheeks.

Yuck! Some of them flew into my mouth.

"Leave me alone!" I flailed my arms. Slapped  
my skin. Spit the buzzing bugs out of my mouth.

Where is that tree?

Still slapping at mosquitoes, I charged deeper  
into the forest. -- and heard the crackle of leaves.

Footsteps.

Animal footsteps.

I froze.

My heart started to pound.

Please, I prayed. Not a fox.

I waited for the animal to show itself.

A mournful howl rose through the forest.

I shivered.

Do foxes howl? I wondered.

I started off again. Tripped on a fallen tree limb.

Hit the ground with a THUD.

Aw, is that you?"

Laura!

"Yes!" I jumped to my feet.

Laura stepped out between two trees. "I was so  
scared." She grabbed her braid and tugged it near

candidly. "I thought you weren't coming. I thought  
you changed your mind."

"No way!" I said.

She took a deep breath. "They were so mean to  
me today."

"Who was mean to you?" I asked.

"The girls in my bunk. They're always playing  
mean tricks on me. They found out I was ticklish  
so today they tickled me until I cried. I have to  
get away from here!"

"I'll continue with you," said. "We'll escape to-  
gether."

Laura let out a whoop of joy. "Thank you. And  
all we have to do is cross the river."

Laura led the way. "The highway is nearby  
on the other side of the river."

Laura led us deeper and deeper in to the woods.  
She pushed low tree branches out of our way. We  
stepped carefully over rocks.

"Are you sure this is the way?" I asked. "None  
of this looks familiar."

A long, loud scratch rang out.

Laura jumped back in fright.

We stopped. And heard another scratch.

An animal shrieking in pain.

"We'd better not stand here," I said, trying to  
hide the fear in my voice. "Let's keep moving."

We walked quickly. I could hear Laura breath-  
ing next.

"What's that?" Laura stopped.

The sound of laughter drifted through the trees.  
Luscious laughter. And whispers. Frightening, echoing  
whispers.

"Do you think there's somebody following us?"  
She bit her bottom lip.

"Uh...no. It's probably just the kids from  
camp. The wind must be carrying their voices."

"There is no wind blowing," she replied.

Suddenly the wind started to blow.

An icy wind from out of nowhere. So strong  
it sent us staggering against a tree.

We wrapped our arms around the tree. The  
wind pinned us to the trunk. Whipped at us.  
Blinded us with its force.

The trees around us creaked and groaned.

"What's going on?" Laura shouted over the  
gale.

The wind blew harder.

"Why is this happening?" she cried in terror.

The wind stopped as quickly as it started.

An eerie quiet fell over the woods.

"I don't get it." Laura's voice trembled. "I've  
been in the woods every night. It's never been this  
creepy here before."

"How far is the river?" My voice shook too.

"Not far." She peered into a clump of trees. "I  
think it's right beyond these trees."

Laura started jogging. She disappeared into the  
woods.

"It's. Wait up!"

At a bend" she called "Come on. See it!"

crashed through the trees, I found Lenny  
standing at the bank of the narrow river

"We just have a swim perhaps and we'll be safe!"  
she said.

She grabbed my hand

She urged me toward the water

I pulled back

"It's very shallow. Don't worry," she said. "I've  
checked it out. Ari. We can wade most of the way."

"Ari, you stand. I'll get a good swimming!" I whi-  
hee.

"I'm sure." She squeezed my hand. "I come on.  
We're almost home!"

Home

That sounded great

I followed her to the river's edge

I took a step into the water

"Stop!" a voice shrieked

I turned to the voice

No one there

"Don't move!" the voice ordered

sucked my eyes and gasped

It was Noah

Floating above us?

Floating just beneath the tree tops

Noah

Heard. Was so light. Floating. Rightly

could see right through him.

I could see the moonlight shining through his body.

"Don't move!" He leaped down toward us. Hovered over our heads.

shrank back.

"DON'T MOVE!" he howled. "I'M WARNING YOU DON'T MOVE!"



# 24

"Let's go!" Laura grabbed my arm and pulled me towards the river. "Don't let him stop us!"  
Nath whispered slowly.  
"But... can't we...?" I asked. "Is he a ghost?"  
"This way!" Laura tugged me hard. "Hurry. Don't let him get you!"  
Nath dove at us again.  
Laura pulled me to the right.  
Nath caught us wildly.  
Trapped us.  
"We can't let him catch us!" Laura yanked on my arm. "We have to get away!"  
We rasped for the river.  
Laura crashed into the water first.

"Jump in, Ari!" Laura cried. "He can't catch you in the water!"

I took a deep breath. I started to jump.

The lake.

Noah grabbed my arm.

He yanked me away from the water.

Laura reached out and pulled me forward.

Pulled me toward the water.

Noah pulled harder. Pulled me back.

A sharp pain ripped through my shoulder.

"Stop! You're pulling me apart!" I screamed.

"Don't fight me!" Noah shrieked. "Don't you know who I am?" His ghostly voice rang through the forest.

"Yes! I know who you are!" I cried. "You're The Snatcher!"

# 25

Noah tightened his grip on my hand  
and my fingers turned to ice  
As the warmth of my body seeped away. The  
chill of death swept through me  
"Let me go!" screamed.  
"Leave Ari alone!" Laura screamed at Noah  
She grabbed my other arm with two hands. Tried  
to pull me free. Tugged me toward the river.  
"You can't escape," Noah smiled, "Not that  
way."  
He grabbed my hand tighter and my arms  
and legs turned numb with cold.  
I yanked my hand back with all my strength  
And finally broke free.  
"I'm not going to be your next victim!" I cried.  
"Don't talk to him. If you stop and talk, you're  
doomed!" Laura yelled.

Laura clutched my hand. She guided me into the river. "Come on. We still have a chance!"

"Listen to me!" Noah floated in front of me. "I'm not The Snatcher!"

"RUN!" Laura jerked me forward. "That's evil! Don't talk to him!"

"I'm not The Snatcher. I'm The Snatcher's last victim!" Noah cried. "SHE is The Snatcher!"

"That's crazy!" Laura insisted. "Don't listen!"

I dropped Laura's hand.

"I'm not The Snatcher. I'm a ghost." Noah said, hovering over me. "Half the campers at Full Moon are ghosts. We're all victims of The Snatcher."

"He's going to kill us!" Laura cried. "Please," she pleaded. "Let's go!"

"Listen to me!" Noah's voice boomed. "Each year we choose someone to help us - someone to free our spirits. We want to rest. We don't want to haunt these woods."

Noah drifted up into the trees.

"There's only one way the ghosts of Camp Full Moon will ever find peace," he murmured. "Someone has to cross the river. Someone alive has to get to the other side."

My heart raced.

I glanced at Laura. Then Noah.

Who should I listen to?

Who should I trust?

Is Noah young?

Is he The Strangler?

We glasses chase you this year. Noah swooped  
down from the tree-top. He stared into my view  
with an icy stare. "We chase you to help us."

He was just Laura's face. Whiter. In fact, it's  
trying to keep you here forever."

"She's the liar?" Noah howled.

Laura tapped on her long blond braid. "Please,  
listen to me. I'm trying to save your life. She is  
sister."

My hair pruned.

My back shook with terror.

It could just think me through.

But it was no use.

I couldn't think clearly.

"Listen me," Laura begged. "I help you escape.  
You've got an entire me."

I took a step toward the water.

Don't go. Noah yelled. "She's the liar! But she

is! You there. A girl's camp? There is none. She  
wants to keep you. She only wants to get you into  
the water!"

Noah whirled madly around us.

The leaves swirled in his path.

The tree branches trembled.

Don't want to get me into the water too."

"Listen to him!" Laura yelled. "He wants to  
kill you!"

"But she won't let you get across alone!" Noah  
shrieked. "We need you to get across alone!"  
My head started to spin.  
What should I do?  
Who should I trust?  
Who?

# 26

**I** STAYED IN AMERICA  
and telling the truth? I wondered  
I turned to Noah.  
"Or is he?"

What about the? we sat paralyzed.

He's going to you. And stopped up to me.  
Her lower lip trembled. "Please come with me.  
I don't want you to die. Yes. The situation. You  
know I'm telling the truth."

as a trap? Noah twisted around us. "She's  
evil. She'll say anything to get you onto the river!"

I didn't know that I had a god given  
them both.

I raced along the dark riverbank.  
mashed grass, mud, weeds and saplings.  
Stumbled over rocks.  
glanced over my shoulder.

Laura charged after me.  
Neph flanked by her side in a race.  
In a race to get me:  
My heart pounded against my ribs. I ran as fast  
I could.  
"I can't wait anymore!" Laura cried out sharply.  
She's crossing the river without me, I thought.  
I stopped running. And whirled around.  
"I can't wait anymore!" she cried out again.  
"Ari - you're the next ghost for Camp Bow  
Moon!"  
Laura leaped forward and I gasped  
Her brown eyes glowed. They flickered in the  
dark and brightened, brightened to red.  
Her body flew through the air.  
Transforming.  
Changing into a fox?  
Changing into The Scoutmaster  
It lunged for me. Dug its claws into my shoulder.  
Snapped its teeth at my face.  
The sharp teeth grazed the skin on my neck.  
I grabbed the creature's front legs. Tried to pry  
them off me.  
It dug its claws deeper into my skin  
I felt a sharp, burning pain. Then hot, wet blood  
as it trickled down my arm.  
The creature let out a low snarl.  
Bit my shoulder.  
Lashed my cheek with its claws



"Get off of me!" yanked he fur on its back I  
jelled-ran really

It brought back its head.

Opened its mouth wide.

It's ready to kill me. I realize. I have to do  
something!

Wait. The creature's selfish. Remembered  
That's it!

The creature's selfish.

I saw the other girls all broke it

pried the creature's body away from my chest

I let out my screaming again

reached for its body

Had my breath - and started to tickle

# 27

I dug my fingers deep into the creature's fur and tickled.

A low growl escaped its throat.

Its head jerked forward. It snarled angrily. Pulled open its jaws.

This isn't working. I am a dead to me, I realized. What should I do now? What?

I grabbed the fox with two hands. Clutched it tightly. Tore it angrily away from me.

Then, with a desperate cry, I heaved the creature into the woods.

I heard a sick, painful grunt as it landed on the ground.

"Hurry!" Noah swooped down beside me. "You can save all the ghost kids at Camp Full Moon. Now's your chance! Cross the river!" he shouted.

I dove for the water  
my feet Nash waited.

Entered at the river's edge. Ima started in  
horror at the hands. Dozens of slimy green hands  
had poked up from the water.

Grasping hands.

Reaching up from the river bottom.

Grabbing for my legs.

Grasping for my ankles.

Horrible noise rose from the river as the hands  
surged out for me.

I staggered back.

"The river is alive with monsters!" Nash said  
floating beside me. "You can't get across by swim-  
ming. Those hands will pull you down. That's what  
The Scudher wants."

I started into the fork river.

The water churned and bubbled as more slimy  
hands broke the surface. Reaching toward the  
shore.

Grabbing blindly.

Ready to pull their next victim down.

"I can't help you. I can't save anyone!" I pro-  
tested.

Yes, you can look over there. Nash pointed  
across the branch to the peninsula over the river.

"I live along that branch. Quick. You can reach  
it."

I stared at the tree branch.

"I don't think I can do it," murmured  
"Of course you can do it, Ari! You're a gymnast.  
That's why we chose you. It will be easy for you!"  
"I'm not..." I started to say I wasn't Ari.  
But I stopped. What's the point? I thought.  
"I'm not sure," I said.  
"If you cross the river we'll all rest in peace."  
Nash's ghostly figure shimmered in the moon-  
light. "Please Ari. You have to try. You have to  
defeat The Snatcher."  
I ran over to the tree.  
I jumped up.  
Grabbed the branch with two hands. And pulled  
myself off the ground.  
Hand over hand. I started to make my way  
along the branch.  
Slowly swung over the forest floor. Moved fur-  
ther out. Out over the water now.  
I gazed down at the murky river.  
At the slimy green hands. Poking up. Sensing  
me. Grabbing at the air. Grabbing for my feet.  
"I-I can't do it!" I screamed.  
"You have to!" Nash wailed. "Keep going!"  
I moved along the branch.  
Kicked my legs. Trying to kick away the grun-  
ing hands.  
Lava waves rose up from under the river.  
My arms grew heavy. A sharp pain ripped  
through my shoulders.  
"I'm not going to make it!" I groaned.

"You're halfway there!" Noah cries, meantime  
I swing one hand over the other  
Grabbing for the branch and gasping.  
"I swear!" I cry. "The branch is slippery. I  
can't hold on!"  
I dangled over the river  
Felt my fingers slipping.  
The mouse from underneath grew louder,  
The hands mania with frenzy, leaping up for  
me. Trying to tug me down  
"I can't hold on!" I shrieked  
My hands slipped off the branch  
I let out a scream as I plunged towards the  
water.

# 28

I closed my eyes.  
Falling falling floating.  
Floating in the water  
No.  
Floating in midair  
"I've got you!" Noah cried. "Don't panic!"  
Yes.  
Noah held me in the air  
We hovered over the water.  
Below us, the red giant hawk tried to snatch  
me from Noah's arms.  
"Grab the branch!" he shouted.  
I raised my arms. Grabbed hold of the tree  
branch and heard a low roar!  
I gazed down and stared into the eyes of the  
fox.

"It's back!" I cried.

"Hurry, Ari! You have to get to the other side!"

Noah instructed.

I started moving across the branch again.

Hand over hand. Fingers aching with pain.

I saw the fox racing up the trunk. Moving steadily toward me.

Sweat poured from my forehead.

My heart hammered in my chest.

The moans from the river grew louder.

I struggled to hold myself up.

Struggled to keep moving.

"Hurry, Ari! You're almost there!" Noah cried.

I gazed across the river.

I was almost there.

Sweat poured into my eyes. Just a few more moves, I told myself.

The branch began to creak. Then bend.

It's going to snap, I realized with horror.

I swung one hand over the other. Tried to move faster.

Glanced to the side—and gasped. The fox leaped onto the branch.

I lost my concentration.

Let my fingers slip.

I tumbled from the limb.

The fox let out a low, menacing snarl. It jumped off the branch. Leaped after me.

I hurtled myself forward.

Landed on the ground on the other side.  
And heard a horrible screech — as the fox fell  
into the water.  
The green hands rose up.  
Grabbed greedily for it.  
They fought for it. Pulled at it in a horrible tug-  
of-war.  
The fox howled in pain — as the hands pulled it  
down ... down ... down below the surface.  
And then, with a sharp *SNAAP*, the branch  
crashed into the water.  
I stood at the river's edge.  
Gazed into the water.  
Watched for the fox.  
Waited for it to reappear. To struggle to the sur-  
face.  
It didn't.  
I stared as the hands eased their way back  
under the water.  
My heart began to beat with a slow, steady  
rhythm.  
I let out a low, long sigh.  
Then shrieked in shock as a hand exploded from  
the water, grabbed my ankle, and pulled.



# 29

**"L**et me go!" I choked out.  
With a desperate cry, I yanked  
my leg back.

Gazed down — and sighed.

Just a vine. Half floating in the water. Not a  
hand. A vine, half wrapped around my ankle.

My legs gave way.

I sank to my knees.

Struggled to catch my breath.

"Thank you," Noah called from the other side of  
the river. "You did it! You were so brave. Now we  
can all rest in peace."

Noah's ghostly form shimmered in the moon-  
light. Then he began to fade away.

"Thank you. Thank you." His voice grew fainter  
and fainter — and then he disappeared.

"I did it!" I realized. "I made it to the other side. I saved all the poor victims of The Snatcher!"

I leaped into the air.

"I really did it!" I shouted with joy. "I'm a new person! I really am a brave new person!"

I pumped a fist in the air.

"I am the man!" I shouted. "I saved the ghosts! I destroyed The Snatcher!"

I gazed out over the river.

The water was calm. It glistened under the light of the full moon.

Whoa!

Wait a minute!

I have a little problem here, I realized.

How do I get back across the river?

"Hey, guys!" I shouted. "Hey — anyone? Can anyone hear me?"

Silence.

"Hel-lo!" I called, cupping my hands around my mouth. "Hel-lo! Anybody! I need a little help here!"

Silence.

Crickets chirped. Trees creaked.

"Is anyone there?" I screamed. "Anyone? How do I get back now? Anyone?!!!"